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"If human rights and democracy are to be meaningful, it is critical that developing countries be assisted in attaining an adequate standard of living. Civil and political rights must go hand in hand with equally important economic, social and cultural rights. [For] respect of human rights to be safeguarded, it is an advantage also to have corresponding economic and social development."

With these words, spoken at the 1991 United Nations General Assembly, Uganda's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paul K. Ssemogerere, summed up a debate that has become increasingly important—the debate over the right to development. Indeed, human rights and development and the right to development will be major topics for discussion at the World Conference on Human Rights, to be held in Vienna, Austria, in June 1993.

The right to development has been defined as the right "to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development". This definition is contained within the Declaration on the Right to Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1986. The Declaration is the result of several United Nations efforts, dating back more than four decades, to define (and promote) that right.

Already in 1941, freedom from want was one of the "four freedoms" proclaimed as the objective of the Allies (the others being freedom of speech, of worship and from fear). The Allies repeated that commitment in the 1941 Atlantic Charter and the 1942 Declaration on the United Nations. In 1948, the right to development was confirmed in Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized".

The 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights marks a further step in elucidating that right. Article 11 of the Covenant, which is a legally binding treaty, obligates States parties to "recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living . . ., including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation".

In 1969, the General Assembly proclaimed the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, stating that "all peoples and all human beings . . . shall have the right . . . to enjoy the fruits of social progress and should, on their part, contribute to it". But the most significant General Assembly action in this area occurred in 1986, with the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development. The Declaration established that right as "an inalienable human right by virtue of which each person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized".

The Declaration proclaims, among other things, that:

- the human person is the central subject of development and should be the participant and beneficiary of the right to development;
- all human beings have a responsibility for development; and
- States have the primary responsibility for creating national and international conditions favourable to the realization of the right to development.

The Declaration also states that the right to development is both an individual and a collective right—a right of "every human person and all peoples"—and adds that "equality of opportunity for development is a prerogative both of nations and of individuals".

In the views of some developing countries, emphasis in the field of human rights has been put on the political and civil rights of the individual at the expense of development rights. Some nations have complained of a "hierarchy of rights", with the right to development in a lower position.

Nigerian delegate Olu Adeniji told the 1992 United Nations Commission on Human Rights that the world has interpreted violations of human rights only in terms of torture, denial of personal freedom, imprisonment without fair trial or involuntary disappearances. For too long, he said, the world has ignored the fundamental right to development and has not examined sufficiently the effect on human rights of a hostile international environment which has hindered national development.

HUMAN RIGHTS

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For the future, developing countries have asked that the international community demonstrate as much commitment to the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights as it has to the promotion of civil and political rights.

Which rights come first?

For some industrial countries, the civil and political rights of the individual are the pre-condition for the right to development. For some developing countries, instead, the right to development is the basis for civil and political rights.

According to the first viewpoint, development can be achieved only if all individuals are able to contribute to it to the best of their abilities and in conditions of equal opportunity. This depends on respect for the rights of the individual and for civil liberties.

As United States delegate J. Kenneth Blackwell told the 1992 Commission on Human Rights, a Government that protects political and civil rights creates the most nurturing environment for development. In his opinion, political and civil rights are the foundation on which the economic and social welfare of the individual should be constructed.

A similar view was expressed by British delegate Henry Steel. Governments should not go beyond their proper sphere, he said, adding that the ordinary citizen would not be motivated to play a full part in the development process unless human rights were fully respected and protected by an open and fair legal system.

The opposite view sees the right to development as a prerequisite for realizing civil and political rights. Pakistan's delegate, Mohammed Saeed Ansari, told the Commission that the realization of the right to development was a sound foundation upon which the superstructure of the entire body of human rights could be firmly raised.

For Mexican delegate Eleazar Ruiz y Avila, development is the most rational way to create stability, promote well-being and encourage democracy and economic expansion. He stated that the right to development strengthened individual freedoms and not the other way around.

A more comprehensive view, such as that expressed in the 1986 Declaration, does not try to separate human rights into distinct categories. In the words of the Declaration, all human rights are "indivisible and interdependent", and the full enjoyment of one depends on the realization of the others.

Democracy and development

All participants in the debate see democracy as essential in realizing the right to development. "Failure to apply and respect the principles of democratic government has been shown to be a serious obstacle to the realization of the right to development", states a 1991 report of the United Nations Secretary-General summarizing the views of Member States.

But many observers say the mere introduction of political pluralism is not enough to turn a poor society into a prosperous one. Madagascar's delegate, Norbert Rastirahonana, told the 1992 Commission on Human Rights that it is necessary to support the democratic changes initiated by various least developed countries.

And Bangladesh's Foreign Minister, Mostafizur Rahman, told the 1991 General Assembly that democracy without development runs the risk of disappearing. "Without democracy a people's potential for socio-economic progress cannot flower. Equally, without improved standards of living and a vision of the future that cannot sustain hope, democracy will wither".

Cape Verde's Foreign Minister, Jorge Carlos Fonseca, concurs. As he told the Assembly, "If today democracy seems to be part of our common culture, and respect for the protection of human rights deserves the support of all countries, then economic development should equally be a major concern . . . Democracy and human rights alone cannot ensure the well-being and happiness of peoples and are certainly not a substitute for economic development. Certainly democracy and the protection of human rights are indispensable conditions for creating a favourable climate for development, but development that is in and of itself an important factor in consolidating democracy also requires human and material resources and a policy aimed at creating a prosperous and wealthy society."

The most vulnerable

There is also widespread agreement on the need to devote particular attention to the right to development of the most vulnerable groups—such as children, women, rural people, indigenous peoples and the extremely poor.

"The abuse of the rights of indigenous peoples is principally a development issue", states a 1991 report of the United Nations Secretary-General. "Forced development has deprived them of their human rights, in particular the right to life and the right to their own means of subsistence . . . Indigenous peoples have been, in fact, victims of development policies which deprive them of their economic base—land and resources—and they are almost never the beneficiaries."

The same report called upon all institutions and individuals "to promote women's right to development, for development that violates women's rights is not development". Despite the recognition of equal rights for women in international instruments, they are often undermined by culturally, religiously or socially sanctioned inequalities between men and women. In addition, development projects sometimes disregard women's traditional roles and their contribution to national productivity, place an undue

burden on women for implementation and create inequalities in access to external resources and services.

Extreme poverty is another threat to the realization of human rights. The 1991 General Assembly stated that extreme poverty is a violation of human dignity, a threat to the right to life and a condition that prevents the most vulnerable groups from exercising their human rights. The elimination of poverty and the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights are interrelated, the Assembly added.

World Conference

One of the six objectives of the World Conference on Human Rights will be to examine the relationship between development and the enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, recognizing the importance of creating the conditions whereby everyone may enjoy these rights. In March-April 1992, at the second Preparatory Committee meeting for the Conference, various developing countries made it clear that they attached special importance to the subject.

India, for example, stated that the 1993 Conference needed to emphasize that development should be the central global concern, so that the weakest and the poorest were enabled to enjoy human rights. China stated that the Conference should reflect the important connection between human rights and economic development. One speaker said that the Conference would be an opportunity to show that the right to development synthesizes all other categories of human rights.

Economic implications

Far from being abstract, the debate on the right to development has far-reaching economic implications.

The developing countries have argued that the current state of the world economy is not conducive to the expansion of human rights. Foreign debts of the developing countries currently amount to more than $1.3 trillion. Primary commodity prices, upon which most economies of the developing nations depend for exports and hard currency, have reached their lowest levels since the 1930s. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, extreme poverty remains the lot of hundreds of millions.

At the 1991 General Assembly, developing countries stated that their efforts should be supported by an increased flow of resources and by measures creating a favourable environment for development. In particular, they said, measures should be adopted at the international level aimed at restructuring international economic relations.

Similar proposals were made at the 1992 Commission on Human Rights. In the view of Nigerian delegate Olu Adeniji, most developing countries are victims of an international economic system that inhibits their economic and social development. He emphasized that the debt burden and ever-falling commodity prices have led to drops in national incomes and increasing impoverishment.

For Kenyan delegate Christopher K. Mburu, the right to development can be realized only by revising the net external transfer of resources from the developing countries to the developed, thereby freeing such resources for the advancement of economic growth; by reducing all types of debts; and by establishing a trading system that is multilateral, transparent and non-discriminatory.

Industrial countries have been called on to help promote the right to development. As stressed in 1990 by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "In the absence of an active programme of international assistance and cooperation on the part of all those States that are in a position to undertake one, the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights will remain an unfulfilled aspiration in many countries."

Without such a programme, the gap between rich and poor countries is bound to increase. As Greece's Foreign Minister, Andonis Samaras, told the 1991 General Assembly, "to support the ideals of democracy, the Western world must also systematically promote and encourage economic development .... Goodwill and sympathy are not enough. We must, at all costs, never allow the old ideological division of East and West to be substituted by a new division of poverty between North and South."

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